

City of York
Safeguarding Children Partnership



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Assurance Report

2021/2022



■ Assurance report and 2021-2022 annual report copy for CYSCP from Maggie Atkinson, Independent Scrutineer

1. This report sums up reports and assurances to the Chief Constable, COO of York City Council and Accountable Officer of the Vale of York CCG (became the area's Integrated Care Board and Integrated Care System on 01 July 2022.) The pages that follow contribute to the Annual Report of the CYSCP for 2021-2022. It builds on a series of periodic verbal and written scrutiny assurance reports given verbally and in writing in 2021-2022 in regular meetings of the CYSCP Executive and its subgroups; CYC's Scrutiny Committee Elected Members and the Lead Member for Children; and the statutory partners' most senior leaders (Chief Constable and PFCC, City Council Chief Operating Officer, and CCG Accountable Officer, now IBS/ICB representative from 2021) alongside their delegated senior officials who actively lead the CYSCP.
2. The report covers all of the evidence collected in my scrutiny role, centred on my being involved in the following work with CYSCP:
 - Attendance at and formal independent scrutiny of the Executive of CYSCP, and its subgroups all of which I have attended since my previous Assurance Reports and the CYSCP's previous Annual Report (published in 2021).
 - Checks against the Statutory Guidance issued by DfE following reforms under the 2017 Children and Social Work Act. "Working Together to Safeguard Children" (WT 2018) places equal weight on the three statutory agencies leading any Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangement (MASA) such as CYSCP, all seats to be held by the most senior Officers or paid Officials in those three agencies (Council, Police Services and CCG,) or their appropriately senior delegated representatives who in practice lead the locality's work on safeguarding. Readers to note: an update of WT 2018 is due at some point in 2022.
3. The CYSCP's structure and ways of operating match the requirements in WT 2018. It's Executive is appropriately chaired by one of the three statutory partners agencies' senior officials, on an agreed annual rotation between the three. The most senior officials in all three statutory partner agencies are kept aware of what their delegated senior leads are doing, and how well the Partnership is working. CYSCP's budget is shared between them, and appropriately accounted for by staff in a small but efficient business unit servicing the Partnership, hosted by the City of York Council.



4. CYSCP's subgroups cover policy and procedures; workforce development; the quality of services provided including partners giving each other clear advice on where practice improvements are required; lessons learned work including the appropriate offer of training and development; interventions with missing children and young people and those at risk of or already subject to all forms of exploitation; the voices and views of the child; and the critical review work needed when there are shortcomings requiring either an internal learning review or a Child Safeguarding Practice Review. Early Help and Front Door services and the work of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) are appropriately routed through relevant subgroups and the work they do is appropriately reported through the Executive. Safeguarding in schools and other educational settings is appropriately guided and led. Every two years, jointly with neighbouring LSCPs, York is a co-leader in a focused Safeguarding Week in which good practice is showcased and CPD is offered in a concentrated period. These have continued online both throughout and following the worst of the Covid-19 period beginning in early Spring 2020. The same regularity of meetings applies to periodic meetings of the CYSCP in its widest manifestation, bringing together both the statutory partners and Relevant Agencies, and always informed by the voices and views of the city's children and young people. The goal is to move towards these greater-partnership sessions taking place face to face by late 2022, subsequent waves of Covid 19 infections and transmission permitting.

5. The City shares an effective, well managed and led Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP) with neighbouring North Yorkshire County Council and its countywide LSCP. This is appropriately chaired by an experienced and senior public health professional, and reports into the Partnership Executives in both LSCPs on a regular basis including through an Annual Report. CYSCP and its North Yorkshire equivalent share an approach to Section 11 and Section 175 safeguarding audits, which are also appropriately reported through the Executive.

6. My feedback to partner agencies in fulfilment of my Independent Scrutiny remit is as follows. It is influenced by levels of risk created by all of the following challenges, which have become so continuous as to be endemic contextual factors, and are therefore spelled out first.
 - There is ongoing and often challenging change in partner bodies' senior staff and governance in agencies across York. There are strengths entailed in ensuring change management and leadership continue and new blood informs and energises them, set against the risks of losing organisational memory or putting a brake on progress as changes begin and are then embedded. The delicacy of the balance between change and continuity is acknowledged by all partners, and I have observed it being negotiated in ways that do not negatively affect the wellbeing and safeguarding of York's children and young people.



- Further, this time a good deal of quite profound organisational change across a number of Partnership bodies is either already underway or imminent as this Scrutiny report is completed. A new permanent Director of Children’s Services (DCS) will join CYC in August 2022, followed later in the year by a new permanent Assistant Director to lead Early Help, Children’s Social Care and related services. Both are sound appointments whose post holders will need to ensure a healthy balance between continuity and change for the city.
- Senior roles are either already filled or will be filled imminently at key levels in the newly forming Integrated Care System to replace and refashion the work of CCGs, working with an alliance of health service providers, represent changes happening in depth and at pace, despite the system still being in the recovery and regrouping stages that have followed the height of the Covid 19 pandemic, with a long tail of effects that are still playing out across all parts of the health economy. The key role of ICB Place Director will be central to ensuring both continuity and development for the commissioning and provision of York health services for children and young people, as will the continuity entailed in the designated safeguarding representatives from the new ICS and health providers.
- It is clear that the role of Assistant Chief Constable is key to safeguarding activity being successful for the Service. It has until recently been filled by a very capable senior officer who knows the city well. As this report is completed the future permanent appointment is still not assured or finalised, and the Chief Constable and PFCC are acutely aware that this creates challenges. Officers have stepped in, and stepped up, to fill the role and to represent NYP on this crucial Partnership.
- The corollary of the observations above regarding continued change in senior roles is that key senior and permanent post holders will now come into the city and its services with gravitas, a critical eye, the right experience and vision. These post holders will come into their own agencies as leaders keenly aware that other agencies’ senior representatives are, at one and the same time, also managing the dual importance of continuity and change in all of their own and their staff teams’ practice.
- Those holding positions of authority and leadership have a sound and continuously improving understanding of the work needed to “get York to GOOD,” and the related need to go on driving positive, consistent change at pace. An Ofsted inspection of children’s social care services reported on a Focused Visit as this scrutiny report was being completed. The City of York Council and its partners accept Ofsted’s recognition that services, in Ofsted’s terms, “Require Improvement to be Good.” Inspectors recognised positive change is underway, seen in practice, leadership, and the city’s ownership of vulnerabilities and needs. They were clear the service needs now to drive for consistency, and the application in all practice of a relational, systemic model of practice, at all levels and by all staff.



- An HMICFRS inspection of North Yorkshire Police Service’s work on vulnerabilities in and the protection and safeguarding of children and young people recognised good work is being done, but pointed out a need for considerable continued improvements, particularly as regards ensuring a higher status for and recognition of the voices and views of children and young people in contact with the service. The service has received the relevant report, accepts that there was a need for improvement however difficult some messages have been to receive, and has assured itself and the Partnership that action planning that is robust and bears fruit is now underway and ongoing. This work will be part of next year’s scrutiny assurance report, and the annual report of the CYSCP of which it forms part.
- I have observed in some detail during 2021-2022 the ongoing, often complex and professionally wearing challenges of meeting demands placed on all agencies by the Covid-19 pandemic, challenges which went on for far longer than originally envisaged and which two years plus after the first national lockdown have left a long “tail” of pressure, challenge, and difficulties in budgets and capacity. The related pressures on the health and wellbeing of staff in all services across the city remain across social care, health, education, police and the justice service, voluntary agencies, faith and community sectors. Post Covid-19 effects remain equally at the fore in both the wellbeing, and a large number of ongoing difficulties, in the lives of children and young people, as they and many families have consistently fed back to the professionals who work with them.
- Issues of resourcing remain considerable; York having been one locality in England what was in any case starting from a relatively low funding base before the Austerity period in which services and teams continue to operate. The resourcing issues being faced are found in systems and services across the Partnership, and encompass their finance, personnel and other resources. All partners and relevant agencies therefore inevitably have continuing issues concerning the resilience of services, and the availability of the right staff to do work that is of a high standard and an equally high consistency. They also report issues concerning the availability of some types of provision for children and young people. This applies particularly where a child has complex or multiple needs, is placed in care and needs a specialist level of it in order to be safe and to thrive, or presents with extreme mental and emotional ill health or distress and needs an equally specialist placement. York is by no means alone in having these issues. They are national and throughout the period covered by this report have been the subject of wide ranging and difficult discussions with government, prompted by localities across England. As this report is compiled the national children’s social care review has now been published as has the SEN Green Paper and a new Schools bill. All of these will no doubt lead to further change and challenge, as well as some potential for improvement.



- CYSCP has, also like other Partnerships across England, also been challenged to respond to tragic and highly publicised cases of children whose deaths have been brought about by people whose primary duty and responsibility was to love and care for them, but who in fact killed them – through neglect, or deliberate and sustained cruelty, or both. That warning bells were rung by people around the children concerned, and that somehow missed opportunities were seen in the nationally highlighted cases, means that all professionals have again paused to consider what best practice, and practice that does not meet the required standards, both look like. The searing effects on dedicated professionals across all services and teams cannot be overstated when cases of this nature come to light. Professionals ask themselves about the standard of what they do as a matter of course, but after such cases those questions gain urgency as well as poignancy. CYSCP, like all similar partnerships, has taken the time and applied the professional honesty needed to assess how close the city’s services are to being assured such a case should not happen here. That the words “could never happen” cannot be assigned to such assessments is clear. That the people who killed the children concerned are the guilty parties, not the workforce that may need to improve its practice, can at times be forgotten by both the media and the public. That services must be assured that all is being done that can be done to avoid such terrible events has been clear and foremost in leaders’ and service teams’ minds as CYSCP has formulated its response.
- The ongoing challenges are equally clear, focusing on ensuring key services can respond to children’s and young people’s needs in sufficiently timely and flexible fashion. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and access to the earliest possible help with mental health and wellbeing present one key example, often discussed at the CYSCP Executive and in subgroups, and raised at Assurance meetings as a cause of ongoing concern with solutions being hard to secure. Partners are acutely aware these difficulties leave some of the city’s most vulnerable children and young people without access to services that could help them and their families, schools and communities to deal with those vulnerabilities. Again, this is a national issue, a fact that does not make it any easier for York to deal with.
- There remains an abiding challenge in ensuring a governance framework that ensures the city’s statutory partnerships (CYSCP, CYSAB, Safer York and one of its sub-sets the new Local Domestic Abuse Partnership, the Health and Wellbeing Board, the All-Age Mental Health Partnership and the individual governance and scrutiny bodies of all of CYSCP’s constituent agencies) receive the right reports, in the right formats and the right order, in timely fashion in ways that keep governance bodies informed and enable cohesive management, leadership and accountability. This challenge entails the need to ensure “cross fertilisation” of the work of each strand in the city’s governance framework, so that children’s and young people’s issues are duly “held” across all partnerships, not only by the CYSCP.



- Partners acknowledge the need to ensure real learning takes place, that will shape, change and lead to proven improvements in practice. This means that all training and development, strong and consistent supervision and the rigorous use of audit and “lessons learned” exercises, must all share a relentless focus on securing and being assured of the quality of practice on services’ front line. This is best characterised as the partnership needing to focus on proving improvement, rather than simply stating it is happening. This applies in children’s social care services, the Front Door and in the MASH or Early Help, and “step up/step down” arrangements for children whose safeguarding issues are referred into or between services. Partners have rightly identified the need for the partnership to facilitate cross-sector learning, characterised in Assurance meetings as CPD in action and in real time. The plan is that this will take place especially through planned opportunities for shadowing, including by different staff accompanying each other on work that takes different disciplines’ professionals into the same families’ circumstances.
- There is determined partnership working evident on issues such as the city hearing more clearly, and acting on, the voices views opinions wishes and needs of its children and young people. In this work, agencies are now working both with each other and York’s children and young people, and bodies such as the city’s universities and their researchers who add depth and evidence-based thinking and feedback into the picture city-wide. The chosen framework for achieving this ambition, that of children’s and young people’s rights as young citizens, is welcomed by all concerned.
- It must be noted that there are challenges beyond the direct control of partner bodies but impacting on the work that many of them do. All of these have potential ill effects on the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in York. For example:
 - » There are ongoing capacity issues and delays in both the family and criminal courts system that mean that some of the city ‘s most vulnerable children young people and families, and the workers who undertake vital work with them in often very difficult circumstances, are left waiting for court time where those working in that system are themselves under great pressure and struggling to do what should be done to ensure justice, safety, the right decisions at the right time, and the ability of all concerned to move on.
 - » There is a growing sense of foreboding about how well York’s poorest families will fare as the economic difficulties currently being experienced across UK society continue to worsen, meaning that for some families, keeping their children dressed, shod, fed and comfortable, at home or school or both, will be severely compromised the longer the difficulties concerned prevail. It is not lost on partners that the strains on families’ lives that could result might have detrimental effects on family cohesion, children remaining



safe from intrafamilial struggles or violence, or challenges that face them and about which neither their families nor services can do a great deal preventively, though all concerned know that waiting for a problem to worsen is not in anybody's best interests.

- » Pressure on and the quality and safety of housing stock also remains a concern for some families and those working with them, given safe secure and dignified places to live are part of ensuring children and families stay safe and can engage with education, health and other support measures or services.
 - » The potential for York to deal with the arrival and needs of those fleeing war or global disruption, from Ukraine or elsewhere in an increasingly troubled world, is hampered by the shortages recorded above in budgets, staffing capacity, the availability of places for people to stay where they will be safe and can rebuild their lives. That such arrivals may be particularly vulnerable and that there are considerable safeguarding issues to be considered is not lost on partner agencies. These are issues that are still emerging as this report is written, but ways of dealing with the challenges concerned will need to be found, as partners are already aware.
7. Partner agencies' representatives at the CYSCP Executive and subgroups, and in periodic meetings with senior officials from partner agencies, have throughout 2021-2022 been receptive, creative, willing to engage in discussions on where there may be sticking points and on how things could and should develop despite the challenges listed above. They are also keen to ensure that "boundary crossing" inter-agency and needs-focused ways of working develop and become the norm. Such boundary crossing ways of delivering for York's communities, and the learning that has come from them throughout the period at the height of the CVI9 pandemic, all continue to bear fruit.
 8. Determination is clear from all concerned in York. They wish to plan, work, train and be held accountable across all agencies, as well as within each one. These ways of operating strongly characterised the work done for children young people and families in York during the pandemic. Partners are keen to ensure the learning is not lost as the "new normal" goes on emerging in the remainder of 2022 and beyond. There is also a clear recognition that this "new normal" is not the same as what was done pre-March 2020, either in individual services or across the partnership.
 9. All of those with whose work as leaders and service commissioners, planners and delivery bodies remain acutely aware that staff wellbeing, in all agencies, remains fragile in mid-2022, and that people dealing with ongoing and sometimes seismic change and development are the same staff teams trying to deal with long-lasting post-CVI9 challenges, alongside continuously shrinking budgetary, staffing capacity, and other resources.




10. Answers to the questions such continued pressures create remain difficult to find, but partners' commitment to the city's wellbeing remains the driving force whenever they are discussed.
11. The contents of this contribution to the 2021-2022 Annual Report of the CYSCP having been rehearsed in detail at regular Assurance meetings with the most senior representatives of each of the key statutory agencies, and explored at development days run for the CYSCP, as Scrutineer I hereby formally state that though there are considerable challenges to continue to address, I am formally assured that CYSCP and partners and agencies working in it are working in compliance with Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018.)

Maggie Atkinson, Independent Scrutineer. 12/07/2022





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